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Initiation of the comprehensive review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. Background and mandate

1. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1996/6, endorsed the multi-year work programme for the Commission on the Status on Women, which included an item on a comprehensive review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.[1] The item will be taken up by the Commission at its forty-fourth session, in 2000. The Council also called for the initiation of the review and appraisal at the forty-third session of the Commission.

2. In its resolution 52/100, the General Assembly decided to convene, in the year 2000, a high-level plenary review to appraise and assess the progress achieved in the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women[2] and the Beijing Platform for Action, five years after its adoption, and to consider further actions and initiatives. The review and appraisal to be undertaken by the Commission will therefore be an input into the plenary review in 2000.

3. The present report initiates the review and appraisal process by the Commission, setting out a framework for the review and identifying the various sources of information which the Secretariat will draw on to provide a comprehensive assessment of achievements and of remaining gaps in implementation since 1995.

4. It may be recalled that in 1988, the Commission on the Status of Women established a comprehensive five-yearly reporting system for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women. The first such review was conducted in 1990, five years after the Strategies had been adopted and at the end of the United Nations Decade for Women (1976–1985). As a result of that review, the Commission and the Economic and Social Council emphasized that the momentum of implementation had drastically slowed since the Forward-looking Strategies had been adopted, and suggested that unless urgent action was taken the Strategies would be at risk. While progress was noted in *de jure* equality, slow progress in de facto equality was evident and low priority was being given to the advancement of women in many countries. The Commission and the Council called for an improvement in the pace of implementation, pointing out that the "cost to societies of failing to implement the Strategies will be high in terms of slowed economic and social development, misuse of human resources and reduced progress for society as a whole" (Council resolution 1990/15, annex, para. 2). A second review, to be carried out in 1995, was called for.

5. In its resolution 36/8 adopted in 1992, the Commission spelled out proposals for a world conference to be held in 1995 in order to consider ways of accelerating action to implement the Forward-looking Strategies. In that connection, the Secretariat, in 1993, provided Member States with suggestions on a model structure for national reports on the implementation of the Strategies which could serve as a basis for the second review and appraisal and be submitted to the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. The structure included suggestions on indicators and data in a number of key areas which would be helpful in carrying out the second review and appraisal. One hundred thirty countries prepared reports. The Secretary-General's report on the review and appraisal drew upon these national reports and on statistical analysis prepared for the 1995 update of *The World's Women*, as well as on regional reviews and analytical work on specific issues undertaken in the United Nations system and by civil society.

6. In an overview report, *From Nairobi to Beijing*, based on the second review and appraisal of the Forward-looking Strategies,[3] the picture presented prior to the Beijing Conference was one of cautious optimism. The challenge remaining was seen to be one of building on what had provoked change and of addressing the key obstacles to progress.[4]

7. It was pointed out in the overview report that in 1995 the global environment for implementing the Forward-looking Strategies had altered significantly. The cold war had ended and there was a growing trend toward democratic government. Market mechanisms were increasingly being used to direct economic activities and global economic interdependence had revealed the vulnerability of heavily indebted States and reduced their ability to compete given their relatively low levels of technology. Structural adjustment was helping to stabilize the global financial situation, but was reducing the capacity of many Governments to provide essential services. The communications revolution was opening the world to a faster means of exchanging information and narrowing distances between countries and cultures.[5]

8. At the same time, other global conferences — on human rights, sustainable development, population, and social development — underscored the need for sustainable approaches to development, the universality of fundamental human rights and the importance of a focus on women to achieve critical goals in population and development and in good governance.[5]

9. The second review and appraisal of the implementation of the Forward-looking Strategies covered 11 of the critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action. "The girl

child" was added as the twelfth critical area during the preparatory process, as a result of regional preparations and of pressure to recognize that true progress could be realized only if the next generation was also the subject of special attention.

10. For purposes of the second review and appraisal, the United Nations system also provided information on the implementation of the Forward-looking Strategies by the international community. The organizations of the United Nations system prepared the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women for the period 1990–1995 (see E/1987/52) as a framework for ensuring that activities to implement the Strategies were included in the plans and programmes of the organizations of the United Nations system and as a basis for reporting on those activities. This indicative plan was discussed by the Commission in 1987 and endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1987/86. The Council in its resolution 1988/59, called for a second system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, for the period 1996–2001, emphasizing the need for increased attention to gender and gender analysis. The Council noted that the draft of the system-wide plan for the period 1996–2001 could not be finalized until after the Fourth World Conference on Women. A revised system-wide plan was therefore prepared in 1996 (see Council resolution 1996/34). The mid-term review of the plan was carried out in 1998 by the Commission, the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Council.

11. A draft system-wide plan for the period 2002–2005 will be prepared for review by the Commission at its forty-fourth session. In preparing that plan, the organizations of the United Nations system will reflect further on the challenges and obstacles encountered in trying to implement the Platform for Action and will propose the next steps and new approaches to be taken, drawing on lessons learned. These reflections will constitute an important input into the preparation of the comprehensive review and appraisal.

II. Activities relevant to the comprehensive review and appraisal

12. There are a number of activities in addition to the preparation of the next system-wide plan that are currently under way or planned and that should contribute useful information and analysis for reviewing progress in implementing the Platform for Action. These include regional activities, national-level reporting, and the preparation of various other reports and reviews, including reports in connection with the five-year reviews of the implementation of the results of other global United Nations conferences held since 1990.

A. Regional activities

13. Plans for regional activities in connection with the five-year review were described in the reports of the Secretary-General submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-second and fifty-third sessions (A/52/789 and A/53/308). Since the latter report was prepared, the updated information has been received. For example, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) convened the second follow-up conference to Beijing, in collaboration with the League of Arab States and the United Nations Development Fund for Women, at Beirut from 12 to 15 December 1998. This was a preparatory meeting for the special session of the General Assembly in 2000, ESCWA will also convene an Arab conference on the integrated follow-up to United Nations global conferences at Beirut in December 1999.

14. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) will hold a high-level intergovernmental meeting at Bangkok from 26 to 29 October 1999. From 19 to 21 November 1997, the Economic and Social Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) hosted the seventh session of the Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean in Santiago, Chile, and adopted the Santiago Consensus (see A/53/87). ECLAC will convene the eighth session of the Regional Conference in 2000. ECLAC has also issued several studies in a series on women and development, including one on progress in legislation since the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (LC/L.1126).

15. In April 1998, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) held an international conference on the theme "African women and economic development: investing in our future", the results of which will contribute to the review and appraisal as well as to identifying future actions and initiatives. The African Centre for Women at ECA has issued a series of country profiles from a gender perspective. These country profiles are available on line at www.un.org/womenwatch.

16. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) is holding consultations at the intergovernmental level in order to decide on convening a meeting of experts which would review issues and policies in ECE countries as they relate

to gender equality and the situation of women in the economic field. Regional preparations for the review of the Platform for Action will be discussed at the annual regional coordinating meeting which has been established in follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/3 on the review of the regional commissions. The meeting is to be chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General.

B. Reporting on national-level implementation

1. National action plans/strategies

17. The Platform for Action requested Governments to prepare strategies or plans of action, preferably by the end of 1995 (para. 297), in consultation with relevant institutions and non-governmental organizations. These strategies should be "comprehensive, have time-bound targets and benchmarks for monitoring, and include proposal for allocating or reallocating resources for implementation". The Secretariat, in May 1996, invited Member States to submit their national action plans/strategies, and prepared a synthesized report on the plans/strategies received by the end of 1997 (E/CN.6/1998/6). The report was submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-second session, in 1998. An update of the report is contained in an addendum to the report of the Secretary-General on follow-up to the Beijing Conference (E/CN.6/1999/2/Add.1), which is before the Commission at its present session. The update is based on 20 additional plans/strategies received since the initial report was drafted. Together, the synthesized report and the update provide a valuable picture of efforts under way in the reporting countries to implement the Platform for Action and as such, may serve as a baseline for the review and appraisal.

18. A growing number of Governments are preparing reports on the implementation and/or evaluation of their national action plans prepared after the Beijing Conference. This information provides a critical input into the review process.

2. Questionnaire to Governments

19. Core information on national-level implementation will be supplied by Member States. In this connection, and pursuant to General Assembly resolution 52/100, the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Secretariat, after consulting with the regional commissions, prepared a questionnaire for Governments on the implementation of the Platform for Action. The questionnaire was sent to the Permanent Missions to the United Nations in New York in mid-November 1998. It contained questions to elicit primarily qualitative information on the implementation of the Platform for Action. The questionnaire was designed to serve as a guide to Member States in reporting on implementation. All States are encouraged to respond to the questionnaire in order to ensure the broadest base of core information for assessing progress worldwide. Governments that have formulated national action plans are encouraged to use them as their baseline for reporting on progress made. All others have been invited to refer to any other relevant plans or strategies in place as a baseline. The deadline for submitting the replies to the questionnaire on review and appraisal is 30 April 1999. A follow-up reminder will be sent in early 1999 with a request for the name of a focal point in each country with whom the Division for the Advancement of Women may correspond regarding the reply.

20. The review and appraisal questionnaire sent to Governments calls for information on implementation in each of the 12 critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action. While the questionnaire seeks largely qualitative information on implementation, it has been suggested that Governments may wish to provide any relevant up-to-date statistics disaggregated by sex and age that may not yet be available to the United Nations, and to report on any related indicators used at the national level to monitor activities for gender equality and the advancement of women.

21. The questionnaire is divided into three parts. The first part invites a brief (3–6 pages) analytical overview of trends and experiences in implementation in the responding country. This overall picture should highlight major achievements and obstacles encountered since the Platform for Action was adopted. The second part focuses on overall implementation in relation to the national action plan or strategy in particular, on resource allocations and on institutional arrangements.

22. The third part of the questionnaire focuses specifically on implementation in the 12 critical areas of concern and should describe innovative policies, programmes and projects or good practices that have been undertaken. Where specific targets have been set, progress against these targets should be reported. Governments were also invited to provide information on future actions and initiatives they plan to take, indicating new commitments made and a vision for women's advancement and gender equality in the twenty-first century.

3. *The World's Women, 2000*

23. In response to General Assembly resolutions 52/231 and 53/120, a third edition of *The World's Women* will be

prepared with funds provided by Member States and United Nations entities. The report will update the data and information supplied in 1995 and thus provide valuable data and analysis on the situation of women in the world.

C. Other sources of information and analysis

1. Preparations for five -year reviews of other conferences

(a) World Summit for Social Development

24. In order to review progress for the five-year review of the World Summit for Social Development, a framework for receiving country information on implementation has been prepared by the Division for Social Policy and Development of the Secretariat, which, *inter alia*, contains a request to Governments for information on progress made towards gender mainstreaming. This is a follow-up to one of the 10 commitments of the Summit, namely the commitment to achieving equality and equity between women and men.[6] The deadline for the receipt of responses by the Secretariat is 30 June 1999. This information will be used for the review of the Platform for Action as well. Moreover, in preparation for the Summit review, studies are being undertaken on a variety of topics — for example, girls' education, paid and unpaid work, and ensuring access to social services by under-served populations. Planning is also under way in the Division for Social Policy and Development for the next edition of the *Report on the World Social Situation*, which will be issued in 2000. The proposed theme of the report will be "Equity". These studies on social issues will be taken into account in preparing the review and appraisal of the Platform for Action, as will information being compiled for the five-year review of the International Conference on Population and Development.

(b) International Conference on Population and Development

25. In preparing for the five-year review of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development,[7] roundtables and technical meetings are being held on such issues as adolescent sexual and reproductive health; partnerships with civil society; reproductive rights and reproductive health programmes, including women's empowerment, male involvement and human rights; international migration and development; population and macroeconomic linkages, and population ageing. Data and other information are being gathered through the Eighth United Nations Inquiry among Governments on Population and Development as an input into the quinquennial review and appraisal of the Programme of Action; the United Nations Population Fund Inquiry of Country Level Experience since the International Conference on Population and Development and inquiry on resource flows; field inquiries by the regional commissions; and national report preparation. In addition, the Population Division of the Secretariat plans to issue a report in 2000 on the theme "Population, gender and development".

2. Other relevant reports

26. Also useful for the comprehensive review of the Platform for Action to be undertaken in 2000 will be a number of reports on women's advancement and gender equality that are to be issued during 1999 and early in 2000. The *1999 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development* is being prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women in cooperation with other parts of the United Nations system. The full report will be issued in June 1999, but an executive summary is before the Commission at its present session in document E/CN.6/1999/CRP.3. The focus of the *1999 Survey* is globalization and women in the world of work. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women was invited by the General Assembly in its resolution 52/231 to submit information on the implementation of the Platform for Action, based on its review of reports of States parties presented since the Beijing Conference. The Committee's contribution will be before the Commission at its present session in document E/CN.6/1999/PC/4.

27. Information from relevant treaty-monitoring bodies on their efforts, within their mandates, to mainstream a gender perspective will also be integrated into the review process. In this regard, the study on the integration of a gender perspective in the work of the human rights treaty bodies (HRI/MC/1998/6), which has been prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women for the tenth meeting of persons chairing human rights treaty bodies, is before the Commission for its information.

28. The World Bank is preparing a policy review report on gender, to be issued in 2000. The United Nations Development Programme is organizing a workshop entitled "Women and Political Participation: 21st Century Challenges", which is to take place at New Delhi in March 1999. UNIFEM is preparing a report on women's empowerment and gender equality, which is expected to be available in mid-1999.

29. In the community of non-governmental organizations, a number of initiatives are under way that will contribute to

the review and appraisal. For example, Equality Now plans to undertake a survey of gender-sensitive national legislation on women's human rights. The Inter-Parliamentary Union sent a questionnaire prepared in collaboration with the Division for the Advancement of Women to all national parliamentarians requesting information on women's political experience and their contribution to the democratic process. By prior agreement, the results of this inquiry will be made available to the Division.

3. On-line dialogues on Womenwatch

30. A series of on-line dialogues on the critical areas of concern will be conducted under the Womenwatch Internet project. Views and suggestions on the implementation of the Platform for Action will be exchanged. The Secretariat will summarize these discussions and make the summaries available in conference room papers to the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-fourth session. A pilot dialogue on women and health was undertaken in September 1998 and an on-line workshop on violence against women was initiated in October 1998. Initial results suggest that these dialogues provide a welcome opportunity for participation from all regions by representatives of Governments, non-governmental organizations and other members of civil society.

III. Expected scope of the comprehensive review and appraisal

A. Overview of the current situation

31. Drawing from the sources and activities outlined above, the review and appraisal report will supply information on an analysis of trends in the advancement of women and the achievement of gender equality in the decade of the 1990s and the implications of these trends for achieving the goals and objectives of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and the Beijing Platform for Action. New developments at the international level that are influencing implementation, such as globalization, human insecurity (both economic and personal) and the changing role of the State, will be examined.

B. Progress in implementation

32. The second part of the review and appraisal report will broadly assess major achievements and other developments at the regional and national levels in implementing the strategies in the 12 critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action. The factors that inhibit or constrain implementation will be analysed. The priority given to the design and implementation of policies and measures to achieve gender equality will be examined. Ways in which the enabling environment for gender equality is being ensured at the national level will be considered — for example, through gender mainstreaming, strengthening the legal framework for protecting women's human rights, the use of temporary special measures/affirmative action, advocacy and the creation of the necessary political will. The second part of the report will also examine how the various strategies and actions in the critical areas of concern are being operationalized at the country level, including through capacity-building and mainstreaming gender in operational activities. The attention given to gender issues in national budgets and resource allocations by sector will be considered, based on information received in response to the questionnaire on the Beijing follow-up. Progress in establishing structures and mechanisms to institutionalize follow-up to the Platform for Action will also be examined with particular emphasis on accountability.

33. In relation to each critical area of concern in the Platform for Action, the review and appraisal will highlight good practices employed to overcome obstacles to women's advancement and enjoyment of their human rights, and will highlight new or innovative approaches, policies, programmes and projects to illustrate approaches to implementation. Where targets or benchmarks have been set, these will be assessed in relation to targets in the Platform for Action on the one hand, and in relation to the extent of implementation of targets in the time period under review on the other.

34. Obstacles and constraints encountered in implementing the strategies in the critical areas of concern will be discussed and lessons learned described, based on experiences of Governments, the United Nations system and other actors. Examples of accountability mechanisms and experiences in using them will be examined. Human and financial resources, and the benchmarks for assessing progress will be discussed to serve as a basis for further actions and initiatives.

C. Conclusions

35. It is anticipated that information concerning specific new commitments and further actions and initiatives at the national level will be provided primarily in reply to the questionnaire described above. It is also expected that issues needing further attention and follow-up action will emerge from the preparatory process at the national, regional and global levels. These issues will be further addressed in the reports requested from the Secretary-General on further actions and initiatives in 2000.

36. Mandates concerning the special session of the General Assembly in 2000 call for the preparation of the outlook beyond 2000 (General Assembly resolution 52/231). The report before the Commission at its present session (E/CN.6/1999/PC/2) on further actions and initiatives, as requested by the General Assembly in its resolutions 52/231 and 53/120, proposes four broad thematic areas that are cross-cutting in nature and that will require greater attention by international organizations, national Governments and civil society in the new millennium if the Platform for Action is to be fully implemented. It also outlines a framework for assessing the extent to which there has been support for advocacy, action and accountability to implement the Platform for Action, and offers examples from the critical areas of concern of ways to achieve these imperatives, which cut across the Platform for Action . The framework offers a guide to Governments and other actors in identifying further actions and initiatives that remain to be undertaken to bring about the fundamental systemic and attitudinal changes needed to achieve gender equality as well as to continue to offer, in the shorter term, protection and support to women and girls who are experiencing various forms of discrimination and violation of their human rights.

37. The Commission, when proposing further actions and initiatives, may wish to keep in mind that the Platform for Action is grounded in a human rights framework that affirms the human rights of women and girls; a life-cycle approach to identifying the needs of women and girls; a gender mainstreaming approach; and partnership between men and women, Governments and civil society and donors and recipients.

Notes

[1] *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4—15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), resolution 1, annex II.

[2] *Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Nairobi 15–26 July 1985* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.85.IV.10), chap I, sect.A.

[3] *From Nairobi to Beijing — Second Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women: report of the Secretary General* (United Nations Sales publication, Sales No. E.95.IV.5).

[4] Ibid., p.vii.

[5] Ibid., pp.ix–x.

[6] *Report of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 6–12 March 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.8), chap.I, resolution 1, annex I, commitment 5.

[7] *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5–13 September 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.XIII.18), chap.I, resolution 1, annex.